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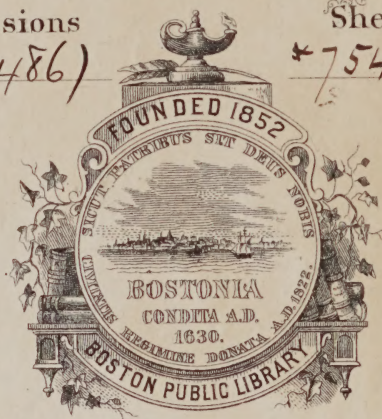
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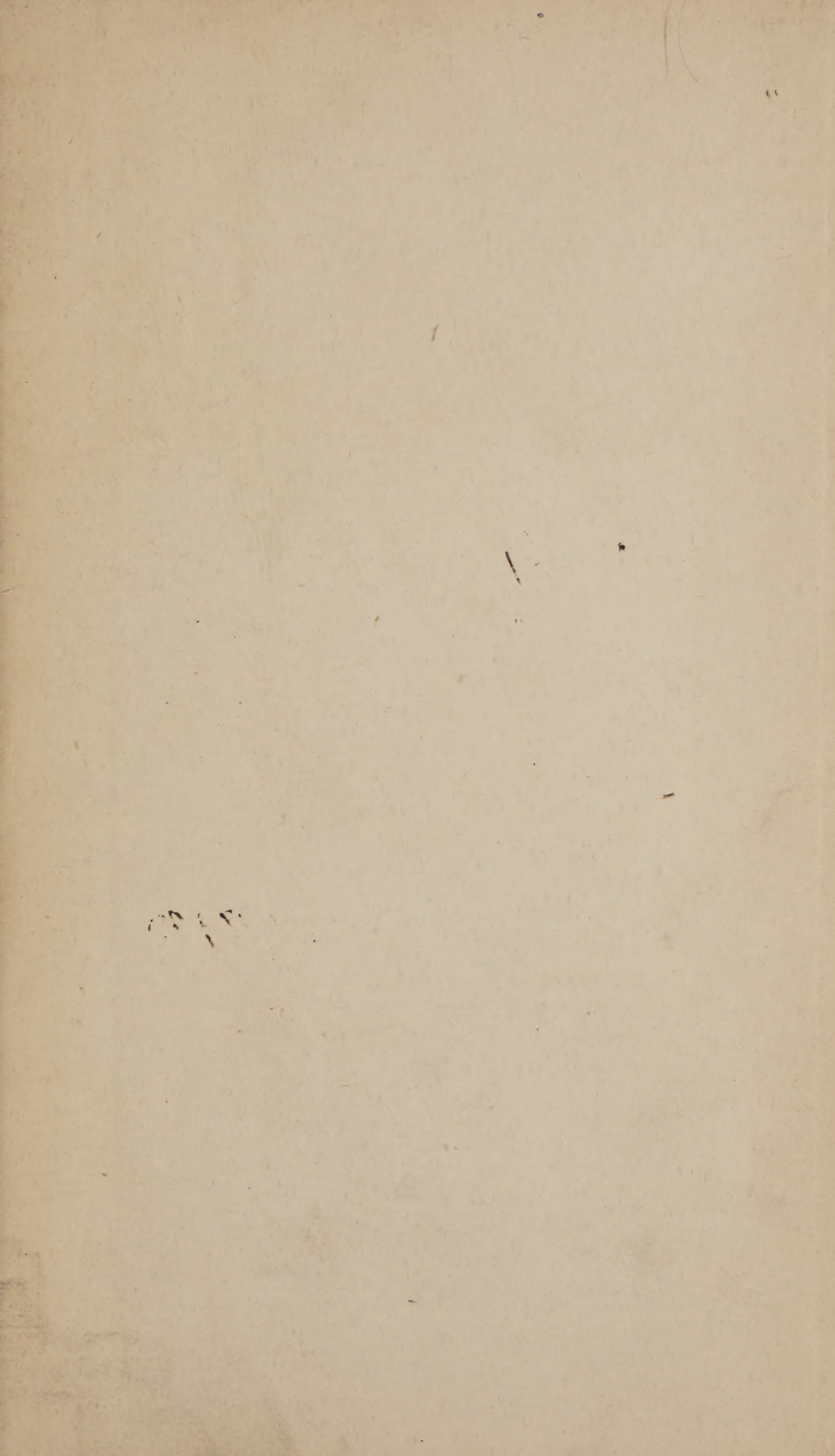
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CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MINISTER'S WORK;

A

SERMON,

PREACHED OCTOBER 22, 1828,

AT THE

ORDINATION

OF

MR. CALVIN NEWTON

AS PASTOR OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH AND SOCIETY
IN BELLINGHAM, MASS.

BY HENRY J. RIPLEY,

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SERMON.

1 CORINTHIANS iii. 9.—*We are laborers together with God.*

IN rescuing men from the influence of sin, various means are employed. The plan by which the rescue is effected bears manifest traces of divinity. But while all the glory to which it is entitled belongs to God, it has pleased him that men should be employed in communicating to men the benefits of the plan. The pious parent, whose children are objects of earnest prayer, who imparts to them suitable instruction and furnishes a consistent example, has a share in accomplishing the merciful purpose of God. The pious neighbor, whose daily deportment reproves sin and strengthens good resolutions, is promoting the same merciful design.

For the more effectual accomplishment of this design, the stated ministry of the gospel is instituted. God appoints certain men from among his people to the work of announcing and enforcing the instructions of the Bible. They are peculiarly his servants. The whole company of faithful ministers are fellow-laborers, jointly engaged in the special service of God.

To-day, an additional laborer is to be set apart to this work. Let us then contemplate a few *characteristics of the service in which ministers of the gospel are engaged.*

It is a RESPONSIBLE service.

Ministers, as servants of God, are accountable to him. On the day of judgment, the manner in which they perform the duties of the ministry will undergo examination. This examination will not be slightly or partially conducted. No favor will be extended to ministers on account of the elevated station they occupy. On the contrary, the investigation which will take place will be proportioned to the importance of their duties as affecting the glory of God and the final destinies of men.

The object for which ministers are appointed, shows how responsible is their office. They watch for souls; for souls, which in conse-

quence of their sins are in danger of endless ruin. The most vivid conceptions of the most powerful human minds probably fall far short of the anguish which will be connected with the second death. But for immortal souls thus exposed, a salvation has been procured, the glory of which far exceeds the loftiest thoughts of man. The author of this salvation has commissioned his ministers: Go, preach the gospel; he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned. Thus the everlasting welfare or the everlasting woe of their fellow-men depends, not a little, upon the manner in which ministers perform their duties.

The souls for whose salvation the minister is required to labor, are precious in the sight of God. Though they are sinful, he still cares for them. He remembers them as the work of his hands. He remembers them as endowed with noble faculties, and as formed for unwasting existence. His eye that looks through infinity sees the heights of glory and of bliss which they may attain. Their very guilt and danger excite an interest in their behalf. What man, if a distressed fellow-creature has somehow fallen into his care and occupied his thoughts, does not feel an interest in his welfare and a desire to afford requisite assistance? And if the supposed unhappy man be in danger of greater distress, will not his wants and the solicitude which has hitherto been exercised, continue to call forth a tender concern for his welfare? To borrow an illustration from the Bible,* the woman, who had lost the piece of money, felt more the value of it from its having been lost and its having so much occupied her attention. The man, one of whose sheep had wandered from the fold, felt a more lively interest in that one sheep thus exposed to danger than in the ninety and nine that went not astray. And what father does not delight in the paternal kindness so abundantly excited towards the prodigal son, who had been reduced to the sad condition of envying even the swine their food, and who had returned in the woful garb of a wretched outcast beggar? What though he had ungratefully forsaken his home? What though he had spent his substance in riotous living? His father had had many an anxious thought respecting him. His father's heart had felt many a pang while reflecting on his conduct and imagining the distress to which he might be reduced. His father's concern in his behalf could not but increase. And now the sight of the returning son recalled the father's solicitude. The anxieties of which he had been the object and the urgent need of kind attentions which appealed to every feeling of the parent's heart, excited, a painful interest indeed, yet a more intense interest, than if his circumstances had not been so deplorable. Judge then of the deep interest which God feels for the souls of men. He pities them as estranged from duty and consequently exposed to misery. For their

* Luke 15th chapter.

restoration to holiness and happiness, he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up. Having thus provided for the welfare of men, you may well believe he watches with most tender regard and with most observing scrutiny, those who engage in the work of their salvation. He will watch his ministers as entrusted with most precious objects.

Consider also the minister's personal obligations. Himself has been redeemed by the Saviour to whom he directs his fellow-sinners. Gratitude to his Lord demands his constant and faithful service. By the goodness which gave him existence and which upholds him in life, and especially by the love which rescued him from the thralldom of sin, he is bound to serve his Lord to the extent of his ability. When he first exulted in the glorious liberty of the children of God, he made an entire surrender of his powers to Him by whom he had been ransomed, and he generously acknowledged it a privilege to be entirely devoted to him. From that moment he has been confessedly not his own. Having unreservedly devoted himself to the Redeemer, he also became deeply solicitous for the salvation of men; his heart was affected by their guilt and danger. He could not be happy till he had given himself to his Redeemer as a herald of salvation. Necessity seemed to be laid upon him. And though he was constrained by the greatness of the preacher's office to say, O Lord, I cannot speak; I am a child: who is sufficient for these things? yet the love of Christ and compassion for perishing souls inflamed his heart and induced him depending upon the strength of Jehovah to say, Here am I; send me.

Can we too strongly conceive of his obligations? He is a creature of God and he has always been sustained by divine providence. Besides, the precious blood of Christ has been shed for the remission of his sins, and he has obtained pardon and a title to the heavenly inheritance. Both in his closet and in the public assembly, he has surrendered himself to the Lord Jesus Christ. Still in addition, he has solemnly pledged himself to the work of the ministry; a work, which he trusts will terminate only with his mortal life.

What office now can be compared with his, in point of responsibility? This office he has voluntarily entered upon, and though his duties might occupy the powers of an angel, he must not shrink. He must gird himself for his work. He must put on the whole armor of God. Looking forward to the day when he shall render up his account, he must cheerfully devote himself to labor, and constantly aim to secure the welcome, Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.

The service in which ministers are engaged is a LABORIOUS service.

This the language of the Bible intimates. We are required to pray that the Lord would send forth *laborers* into his harvest. Paul declared near the close of his life, I have *fought* a good *fight*.

With this intimation correspond the duties incumbent on the min-

ister. His duties are not the less laborious because he does not work with his hands to support his family and to amass property. His labors are very much labors of the mind. They are not indeed perceived by all, but they are felt by him who performs them. The diligent minister is often conscious of such an exhaustion both of his bodily and of his mental powers as can scarcely be conceived of by another person. You see him not indeed in a workshop, or at the plough. But, to say nothing of the fatigue produced by his public ministrations, the spiritual welfare of those who are committed to his charge burdens his mind with anxiety. Follow him also into the apartment devoted to prayer and to study. There he labors, provided he has a correct perception of duty: and he labors not for himself, but for his people and for the cause of God; not to amass wealth or to procure the distinctions of this world, but to enrich his mind with valuable information, and to become prepared for the approaching Lord's day. And when the Lord's day has arrived, and you listen to the prayers and instructions of the man of God, estimate not the labor of a discourse by the time which is occupied in its delivery. Several days may have been spent in preparing and arranging the materials of that discourse. While you were laboring for temporal sustenance, your minister was also laboring for your souls' sustenance. While your labors were followed by the quiet repose of the night, he perhaps was still studying for your benefit; or if he had retired to rest, the exertion of his mind during the day would not permit him to sleep in quietness.

On this point many greatly mistake. They think of one day in seven on which the minister is employed in public instruction; they think of the meetings for religious purposes during the week, which may occupy but a few hours; they think of a few pastoral visits; and they believe that with such employment a man ought not to speak about labor, and that he ought not to expect a provision for all his temporal necessities. But such persons widely mistake. They think only of the results, and consider not the long process by which those results are produced. With as much propriety might they say, that the husbandman is not a laboring man, because after he has gathered in his harvest he walks but a few steps to give food to his cattle, or to furnish the requisite quantity of bread-stuff for his family, or because he can sometimes sit down to his meal without having labored just before. What if he had not labored at the suitable time, with the plough, with the scythe, and the sickle? What if he had not taken the pains to collect the fruits of his grounds and to deposit them in their proper places? And suppose the minister should not labor in his appropriate way, with the Bible and other books, by study and by prayer, could he on the Sabbath or at other times bring forward provision for your souls? He might present himself in the place of worship and perform the usual exercises. But you would in vain expect

to be refreshed by the ministrations of such a pastor. You would leave the sanctuary, Sabbath after Sabbath, without the aspiration from full hearts, Our souls have been satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and our mouths shall praise the Lord with joyful lips. No, my hearers; the conscientious minister who has settled it in his heart that his people must be instructed, that under his ministry they must have no excuse for failing to become intelligent and active Christians, will soon find that he has undertaken a laborious service.

The minister is a teacher. He must himself acquire information and be able to illustrate the subjects on which he teaches. These subjects are of supreme importance; they affect the eternal interests of every man. A mistake in his instructions may bring in its train the ruin of souls.

Besides, he has to instruct persons of exceedingly various characters. Some are slow to comprehend instruction. Some are quite unconcerned. Some are utterly reluctant to receive the truths which he enforces. Many are so occupied by domestic avocations and other cares of life, or by the pleasures of youth, that unless his method of instruction be appropriate to their circumstances, they will not come under the influence of the Bible. And yet his people must be taught, or he will have a guilty conscience. To the aged and to the young, to parents and to children, to rich and to poor, to church-members and to those who make no profession of love to God, he must wisely adapt his efforts. He must endeavor to make the great matters of religion plain, so that none through ignorance may fail of attaining the favor of God. Is this a light work? Well might an apostle tremble.

The pastor must be the friend of the afflicted. For those who are beginning to be solicitous for their eternal welfare, he must continually watch so as to set their feet in the way of life. He must attend to the state of the church; to the preserving of purity and spirituality in its members; to the encouraging of the fainthearted; to the reproving and reclaiming of the backslider; and, in general, to whatever may be connected with his having the testimony of a good conscience both in respect to those who embrace the message of eternal life and to those in whom he must be a savor of death unto death.

In this age of the world, no minister can innocently confine his regards to the people who are especially entrusted to his care. The great operations which are now in progress for the enlightening and saving of men, claim a share in every man's and especially in every minister's attention. The minister must endeavor to excite a spirit of benevolence and liberality, so that those over whom he is placed may contribute their prayers and their pecuniary assistance.

Look now at the minister as a teacher, whose instructions will affect the eternal state of men; a teacher, whose instructions are in danger of being overlooked, or misunderstood, or perverted. Consider

him as the man on whom is devolved the care of the church; from whom the afflicted expect sympathy and advice; on whose directions those who are inquiring the way to heaven place much reliance. Consider him as the counsellor of the dying, as the guide of youth and children, as the man whose comprehensive benevolence must include destitute sections of his own country and the millions of the unevangelized. Say now, is the office to which he is called a mere sinecure? Is it such an office as that any other man may envy him? Can his duties be performed without industrious, persevering labor? No. The conscientious minister finds enough to occupy his thoughts without mingling in the ordinary pursuits of men. He finds enough to employ him without partaking in political strife, and without extensively indulging in the elegancies of science and literature. Let it be his determination to be a good minister. He will have work enough; and work that will not unfrequently come upon him with a pressure that he cannot well sustain and from which no human being can relieve him.

But while the service of the minister is thus responsible and laborious, it is also a PLEASANT service.

The good minister is actuated by love and gratitude to his Lord. His most faithful labors can never equal his obligations; and to promote the honor of the Saviour he esteems a privilege. The Saviour is honored by the success of the gospel; and hence the good minister will gladly spend and be spent in the discharge of his duties.

He considers too who the beings are for whose welfare he labors. They are his brethren, partakers of the same nature with himself, and with him destined to immortal existence. They are beings with whom he has a fellow-feeling; with many of whom he has a personal acquaintance; with some of whom he is united by the ties of friendship and of kindred. With all of them he expects to appear before the judgment seat of Christ. With some of his hearers he expects to enter into mansions of glory; while others, he perceives, are in danger of unutterable woe. What benevolent heart will not account it pleasant to labor for the salvation of such beings? What minister will not consent that his cares should be doubled, if it were possible, in order to bring men to heaven?

And O how delightful it is to the minister who loves the Lord Jesus and the souls of men, to anticipate the result of his labors! He may indeed have reason to fear that some of his hearers will neglect the Saviour and bring upon themselves interminable anguish; and perhaps none but a faithful minister or a pious parent can conceive of his pain of heart when contemplating the state of such men. But others will embrace the offered salvation. They will be his glory and joy; their standing fast in the Lord will impart life to his soul. He rejoices in

the fruits of the Spirit exhibited by them; in their inward peace and satisfaction; and in the usefulness of which they are the instruments. When viewing a single person thus blessed by his means, he feels that his labors are richly compensated; he envies not the splendid honors of the monarch; all earthly glory dwindles into insignificance. He extends his view. He beholds that individual released from the imperfections and sorrows of the present life, an inhabitant of heaven, associated with an innumerable company of angels and with the spirits of just men made perfect; possessing without fear of loss the favor of God the judge of all, and of Jesus the mediator of the new covenant; moving forward in an endless course of holiness and bliss.

But not only will one be thus blessed. Hundreds may be translated from darkness into light. Each who becomes a partaker of God's saving mercy may exert a salutary influence on others, and the beneficial effects will be felt through all time and all eternity.

How pleasant, again, must that service be, the successful result of which imparts joy to holy angels, and glorifies him who deserves the highest adoration of all intelligent beings!

The text exhibits a pleasant consideration connected with the minister's work. It is, the companionship which he enjoys. We are laborers together with God. Probably the Apostle intended to express the idea, that those who are specially devoted to the gospel are fellow-laborers in the service of God. Though their attainments be diverse, though the immediate result of their labors be not the same, yet being actuated by the same spirit they are unitedly engaged in accomplishing different parts of the same great undertaking. Cheering indeed is the reflection that all the faithful ministers of Christ are fellow-laborers, engaged in the same work, looking forward to the same blessed result, the general prevalence of holy obedience to God. No minister stands alone. He has the countenance and aid of brethren. There are hundreds and thousands whose spirit is congenial with his. The work to which he is devoted is an object of exertion and attachment to thousands besides; and though his solitary efforts would make but a slight impression, yet the united labor of all the fellow-workmen of the Lord will effect a result which will forever excite the admiration of heaven.

Not only are human beings interested in this work. Angels are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation. They rejoice at the repentance of men. At the Saviour's advent and during his agony, it was clearly shown that they cherish an eager concern in the work of human redemption. This cause our Lord Jesus by the effusion of the Holy Spirit and the arrangements of his Providence, is still promoting. It is loved by the Almighty Governor of the universe, our Heavenly Father. He has promised it success; and, blessed be his name, the present day is distinguished by an abun-

dant fulfilment of his promise. Thus ministers are fellow-laborers of God and laborers together with God. He has formed his designs and he specially calls upon his ministers to labor in accomplishing them. In this labor, they have the approbation of God and of angels, and they are helpers of each other. What a blessed society!

There are several other considerations which give the character of pleasantness to the minister's work. To these, however, only allusion can now be made. His work is gratifying to the benevolent feelings of his heart. It is sweet to labor for the good of others; to deliver them from ignorance, from sin, from ruin. His work may have an immediate connexion with his advancement in personal piety. While the labors of other men tend to withdraw the affections from divine objects, his direct business is, to learn the will of God, to be holy, and to contribute to the holiness of others. The faithful minister's labors will also be followed by a rich reward in the everlasting kingdom of the Saviour. Well then may the minister of the gospel say, Unto me is this grace, that is, favor, given, that I should preach the unsearchable riches of Christ.

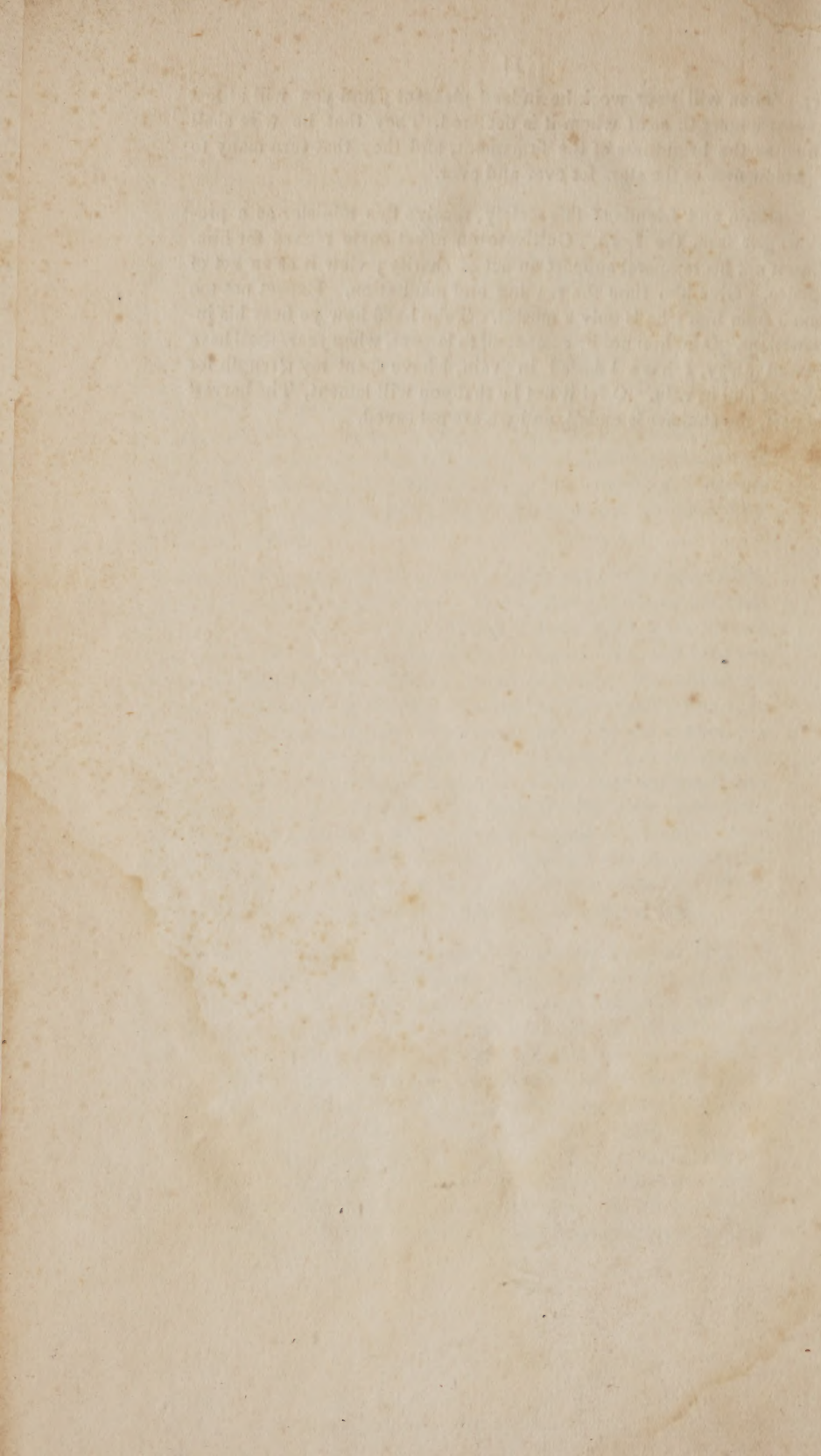
Fathers and brethren in the ministry, we are called to a responsible, a laborious, yet a pleasant service. Let us this day renew our vows of fidelity to our Lord. Let us cherish a warm attachment to each other and to all the faithful ministers of Jesus. We will love one another as fellow-laborers, with pure hearts fervently. We will be ready to impart counsel and aid, to sustain one another's good name, to do all we can for increasing each other's usefulness. By our sharing in a common work, let us join our hearts and our hands. Let our community be indeed a community of brethren. If on earth we live in love and peace, if here we diligently toil to promote the cause of our Lord, what delightful reflections will in heaven occupy our minds! Soon the grave will receive these frail bodies. Soon we and they for whose souls we watch, must stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Whatsoever then our hands find to do, let us do it with our might.

My beloved brother, at your entrance upon the pastoral office, accept my sympathy. You are called to a responsible and laborious service. You will need a large measure of divine influence; but God will supply all your need. You will need the counsel and aid of your brethren; your brethren will not withhold them. Occupied in such a service, be it your chief solicitude, by pureness and by knowledge, by love and faith unfeigned, by diligent devotion to your work, to please your Lord and to commend yourself to every man's conscience.

Accept too my congratulations. You are called to a pleasant service. Let your heart glow with love to the Lord whom you serve. Cherish a tender affection for the souls of men. Be cheered by the blessed consequences which result from the faithful labors of a minis-

ter. Then will your work be indeed pleasant ; and you will at last appear among those of whom it is declared, They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

Brethren and friends of this society, receive this minister as a precious gift from the Lord. Cultivate an affectionate regard for him. Count not his temporal support an act of charity ; view it as an act of justice. Give him time for reading and meditation. Expect not too much from him ; he is only a mortal. Take heed how ye hear his instructions. O let him not be compelled to lament, when years shall have passed away, I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and in vain. O let it not be that you will lament, The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.





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